

Erie County Savings Bank  
16 Niagara Street  
Shelton Square  
Buffalo  
Erie County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5615

HABS  
NY  
15-BUF  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## ERIE COUNTY SAVINGS BANK

HABS  
NY,  
15-BUF,  
3-

Location: 16 Niagara Street, Shelton Square, Buffalo, Erie County, New York

Present Owner and Occupant: Erie County Savings Bank

Present Use: Bank and offices

Statement of Significance: As an important center of Buffalo's financial community, the Erie County Savings Bank marked the lower section of the commercial district. The other structures surrounding the square include Sullivan's Prudential Building, Burnham's Ellicott Square Building, and Upjohn's St. Paul's Cathedral. /The Erie County Savings Bank was demolished in 1968./

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: September 11, 1890, to June, 1893.
2. Architect: George B. Post. A competition was held among twenty-four architects.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Title to the land was obtained by the Erie County Savings Bank April 18, 1889, at a cost of \$135,000. The final cost of the land was \$188,500.
4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: Superintendent of construction, C. M. Morse; excavation, Thomas H. Brown, Buffalo; stonework, Stoney Creek Granite Co., Branford, Conn.; ironwork, Houge, Ketcham and Co., Indianapolis; masonry and carpentry work, McAllister and Dale, Cleveland; consulting engineer in charge of electrical installation, Thomas A. Edison.
5. Original plans: The Erie County Savings Bank has approximately twenty-two original tracings. Copies of the working drawings--ink on paper backed with cloth--are also in file at the Erie County Savings Bank.

An Historical Sketch of the Erie County Savings Bank  
written in 1909, pp. 63-74, included the following

notes on the original plan and construction of the building: "The banking house is on a triangular lot, /and is/ nine stories high on Main Street side and ten on the Pearl Street side, exclusive of attic and cellar. The second story is mezzanine, above this are seven stories for offices. The original plans provided for 145 offices, some of which have since been joined into suites. Base lines of the building measure 157' on both Niagara and Church Streets, 147 on Pearl, and 47 on Main enclosing an area of about 17,000 square feet. The main entrance is on Niagara Street; the structure is recessed above the entrance, thus all offices look out on a street. There are no back offices. The main entrance has a pillared archway, is surmounted by a balustrade flanked by bronze lions."

6. Alterations and additions: New elevators were installed in 1925. The building was remodeled in 1932; the banking rooms were enlarged and entirely redecorated and relighted. New steel vaults and an air conditioning and cooling system were installed, c. 1937.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

This structure was erected on the site of the "Old First," the First Presbyterian Church. Many well-known residents of Buffalo served on the board of directors of the bank. Among the depositors were Millard Fillmore, Grover Cleveland, Congressman Daniel Lockwood, Father Baker, and others.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society has a minimum of fourteen catalogued photographs in the Iconographic Collection.
2. Bibliography:
  - a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Archives, Erie County Savings Bank.
  - b. Secondary and published sources:

Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Minimum of four indexed entries for newspaper articles.

Buffalo Evening News. June 28, 1967.

Commemorating Our 80th Anniversary. Buffalo: Erie County Savings Bank, 1934.

An Historical Sketch of the Erie County Savings Bank:  
1854-1909. Buffalo, 1909.

The Savings Accounts of Successful Buffalonians.  
Buffalo: Erie County Savings Bank, 1937.

Sturgis, Russell. "Great American Architect Series,  
George B. Post." The Architectural Record, 1905.

c. Likely sources not yet investigated.

Archives of George B. Post and Sons, New York His-  
torical Society.

Prepared by Staff, Buffalo and Erie  
County Historical Society  
November 9, 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Romanesque Revival style of this structure was revealed in its texture and detailing. The firm of Burnham and Root, in the Woman's Temple, Chicago, 1891-92, also had translated these design features into the vocabulary of commercial architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: The building was demolished in 1968.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The nine-story, triangular shaped building was approximately 147 feet by 157 feet. The south facade had six bays; the west facade had five bays.
2. Foundations: The concrete foundations were seven to thirteen feet thick.
3. Wall construction: The slightly dressed, red granite, ashlar masonry walls were backed with brick.
4. Structural system, framing: Although the exterior walls were load-bearing, the building had an interior steel framing system.

5. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: The south entrance was reached by an extended straight-run stone stairway of seven steps. The north, or main, entrance had an extended entrance stairway of nine steps. Both stairways had metal handrails.
6. Chimneys: One decorative granite chimney was located in the east arm.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The two revolving doors of the main entrance on Niagara Street were contained within a deeply recessed granite arch. Smaller, similarly arched entrances were located in the west and south facades.
  - b. Windows: Each bay was marked distinctly by vertical groupings of four floors of windows, all capped with a granite arch. All windows had double-hung, single-light sashes. In the second, third, fourth, and fifth floors, the windows were grouped in threes within the arched composition. The first floor and mezzanine windows were framed as one unit, with a granite arch and decorated spandrels finishing the composition. The sixth-floor windows were treated as a band of single, recessed openings encircling the building below the cornice.
8. Roof: The three-story hipped roof was originally covered with tile. It was replaced by copper sheeting. In some sections copper eaves were applied to the low-profile, granite cornice. Ten towers with conical copper roofs pierced the roof line to extend one story above the cornice. Ninety-three gabled and shed-roofed dormers were arranged to clearly define the stories contained in the roof. All gabled dormers were finished with granite moldings and decorative finials.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The main entrance facing northeast opened into a semi-circular lobby. Two banking rooms, one running north-south in the western portion of the building and the other occupying the eastern portion, were reached from the lobby. A north-south corridor extended from the lobby to the southern entrance. The stairway and two banks of elevators were located off this hallway. The seven stories of office space originally provided 145 offices. Some were joined to form suites. All offices had a street view.

2. Stairways: The open, ornamental iron stairway had marble treads.
3. Flooring: Public spaces and corridors had terrazzo floors. The oak floors of the offices were laid on wooden sub-floors and sleepers which were placed over tile arches. All door sills were marble.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings were plaster. The lobby was finished with marble walls and gold leaf ceiling. All surfaces were marble.
5. Doorways and doors: All doorways and doors were made from solid Mexican mahogany.
6. Special decorative features: None.
7. Hardware: All hardware was brass.
8. Lighting: Although the structure was electrified throughout at the time of its construction, it also was piped for illuminating gas.
9. Heating: Low-pressure gas steam boilers were installed in 1957.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The bank faced north-east across Niagara Street, a busy commercial street. It was bounded on the west by Pearl Street, on the south by Church Street, and on the east by Main Street.
2. Walks: A radiant heated sidewalk was installed in 1957.

Prepared by Susan R. Slade  
September 1973

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This photo-data book was prepared as part of a 1964-65 recording project in cooperation with the Buffalo-Western New York Chapter of AIA, Olaf William Shelgren (at that time Chairman of the Chapter's Preservation Committee), and Olaf William Shelgren, Jr.--both, of the firm Shelgren, Patterson and Marzec. Photographs were made in May, 1965, by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer. Under the direction of John C. Poppeliers, Chief, HABS, an editorial project was undertaken in September, 1973, by Susan R. Slade, architectural historian.